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BOSTON LANDMARKS COMMISSION

Public Hearing on

THE ARMORY OF THE FIRST CORPS OF CADETS

130 Columbus Avenue and 97-105 Arlington Street

Tuesday, January 25, 1977 - 4:30 P.M.

Room 921, City Hall, Boston, Massachusetts

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Contents

	<u>Page</u>
Attendance	1
Notice of Hearing, Purpose of Hearing	2
Definition of Landmark, Criteria for Designation	2-3
Study Report - Excerpts	3-4
Order of Testimony and Other Rules for Conduct of Hearing	4-5
Statements	
Boston Redevelopment Authority: Robert F. Walsh, Director (letter, read by Deborah Fawcett)	6
Massachusetts Historical Commission: Elizabeth Reed Amadon, Executive Director (letter, read by Marcia Myers)	7
I. J. Silverman, attorney, representing Fitzgerald Investment Trust, Lanfritz Trust, and Kenfritz Trust, owners	8-9
Back Bay Federation for Community Development: Daniel Ahern, Executive Director	10-11
City Conservation League: Ann Beha, First Vice President	12



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Public Hearing on
THE ARMORY OF THE FIRST CORPS OF CADETS
Tuesday, January 25, 1977 - 4:30 P.M.

PRESENT

Commissioners: Pauline Chase Harrell, Chairperson
Libby Blank
Lawrence A. Bianchi
Martha Rothman
Henry A. Wood

Alternates: Virginia Aldrich
Romas Brickus
John F. Cooke
Susan B. Davis
Roger P. Lang
Margaret S. Smith
Carl Zellner

ABSENT

Commissioners: Thomas J. Hynes, Jr.
Luix Overbea
Morgan D. Wheelock, Jr.

Alternates: James Rivers Adams
Joan Goody

PRESENT:

Staff: Marcia L. Myers, Executive Director, Boston
Landmarks Commission
Richard Hynes, Assistant Corporation Counsel,
City Law Department

CHAIRPERSON PAULINE HARRELL called the meeting to order at 4:40 p.m.,
announcing it as for public hearings on the Donald McKay House and the
Armory of the First Corps of Cadets.

CHAIR: Is there anyone here on the matter of the Armory? (Several members of the audience responded affirmatively.) Can I see a show of hands?

Then, for a couple of technical reasons, we would like to take the Armory first. Will the Executive Director please read the NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING.

MS. MYERS: "The Boston Landmarks Commission will hold a public hearing on January 25, 1977, concerning the designation of the Armory of the First Corps of Cadets, located at Arlington Street and Columbus Avenue, Boston, as a Landmark according to the provisions of Chapter 772 of the Acts of 1975. The hearing will be held in Room 921 at Boston City Hall at 4:30 p.m. A report on the proposed designation is available at the offices of the Commission, Room 963 at Boston City Hall.

Marcia L. Myers
Executive Director"

CHAIR: Thank you.

The purpose of the public hearing on this matter is to present the findings of the Study Report on the potential designation, to hear testimony of persons having an interest in the potential designation, and to obtain information which may be of assistance to the Commission in arriving at a decision on this matter.

Marcia, could you present the summary of the findings of the STUDY REPORT.

MS. MYERS: First, I will read the definition of "Landmark" as found in Section 2 of Chapter 772 of the Acts of 1975:

"'Landmark', any physical feature or improvement designated by the commission in accordance with section four as a physical feature or improvement which in whole or part has historical, social, cultural, architectural or aesthetic significance to the city and the commonwealth, the New England region or the nation."

And under Section 4, the criteria for a designation:

"The commission may designate any improvement or physical feature as a landmark, and may designate any area in the city as a landmark district, or architectural conservation district and may amend any such designation as herein provided upon a finding

by the commission that the designation or amendment meets any of the following criteria: - (a) inclusion in National Register of Historic Places as provided in the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966; (b) structures, sites, objects, man-made or natural, at which events occurred that have made an outstanding contribution to, and are identified prominently with, or which best represent some important aspect of the cultural, political, economic, military, or social history of the city, the commonwealth, the New England region or the nation; (c) structures, sites, objects, man-made or natural, associated significantly with the lives of outstanding historic personages; (d) structures, sites, objects, man-made or natural, representative of elements of architectural or landscape design or craftsmanship which embody distinctive characteristics of a type inherently valuable for study of a period, style or method of construction or development, or a notable work of an architect, landscape architect, designer, or builder whose work influenced the development of the city, the commonwealth, the New England region, or the nation."

The findings of the STUDY REPORT on The Armory of the First Corps of Cadets includes the following:

The Armory is located at 130 Columbus Avenue and 97-105 Arlington Street.

"The Armory of the First Corps of Cadets is a rusticated granite-faced building consisting of the four story Head House, a six story hexagonal tower, and a single-story Drill Hall. The foundation is of granite, and the external walls are twenty inches thick."

"The Armory of the First Corps of Cadets is the only remaining High Victorian armory in the City of Boston. The nineteenth century witnessed the construction of a large number of armories for local militias. The great majority of these structures were architecturally inspired by the medieval fortress, thereby capturing the romantic values associated with patriotism and military life. . . . The First Corps Armory is one of the most interesting among these unusual architectural forms remaining the region.

"The Architect of the Armory, once a member of the Corps, is William Gibbons Preston. . . . The design for the Armory ranks as an outstanding achievement of this prominent Boston architect.

"By its association with the First Corps of Cadets, the Armory represents an interesting aspect of Boston's history. The Corps, bearing the title of the Company of Gentlemen Cadets, was chartered in 1741 as the bodyguard of the Governor of the Province of Massachusetts Bay. Their subsequent service . . . exemplifies the varied roles the local militias adopted during the nation's development. . . . "

The Corps participated in the Revolutionary War, the Civil War, and World Wars I and II.

A secondary function of the Corps of Cadets is as, in effect, a social fraternity for Boston's elite.

The Armory also has urban design value, and a description of that role is contained in the Report.

"Relationship to the Criteria for Landmark Designation:

"The Armory of the First Corps of Cadets satisfies the definition of Landmark, as stated in Section 2 of Chapter 772 of the Acts of 1975, as an improvement which in whole has historical, cultural, and architectural significance to the city, the commonwealth, and the New England region. The Armory meets the criteria in Section 4 of the Acts in that it is included in the National Register of Historic Places; it is a structure at which events occurred that best represent the local militia as an important aspect of the military and social history of the city and the commonwealth; and it is a structure that represents architectural design which embodies the distinctive characteristics that are inherently valuable for study of a period and style and that is a notable work of an architect whose work influenced the development of the city."

"It is recommended that the Boston Landmarks Commission designate as a Landmark under Chapter 772 of the General Laws of 1975 the Armory of the First Corps of Cadets, at Arlington Street and Columbus Avenue, Boston,"

and that the boundaries be as noted in the Report and that the standards and the criteria for design review subsequent to designation be as included in the Report.

CHAIR: I'll read the order in which we will hear testimony. First, statements by elected officials and executive directors of those agencies having review responsibilities as provided in the enabling statute; then statements and presentation of evidence in support of the proposed designation; then statements and presentation of evidence in opposition to the proposed designation; and then rebuttal if any. Within the categories of presentation of material in support and opposition to the proposed designation, the following order is followed:

First - those individuals directly involved with the property under consideration - that is, owners, managing agents, tenants, users, etc.;

- second - owners from abutting and nearby areas;
- third - residents from abutting and nearby areas;
- fourth - representatives from interest groups, local organizations, and public agencies;
- fifth - qualified individuals offering professional opinion or expert testimony; and
- sixth - the general public.

Normally we ask that you limit your speaking to five minutes. We ask that you come up and identify yourself at the beginning of your statement for the transcript. And we also remind you that if you have more to say than you can say in five minutes, you have three days from the date of this hearing to get to us a written statement of your feelings.

The first thing we have to do is to record appearance of counsel. Is there anyone being represented by counsel? If so, would counsel please identify themselves for the record.

MR. I. J. SILVERMAN: I am attorney for the owner of this property, although your notice is defective in that you describe the current owner as "Sixty Five Bedford Street, Inc." That's utterly erroneous; we know of no such company. I do represent the true owner of fact, which is the Fitzgerald Investment Trust, Lanfitz Trust, and Kenfitz Trust. So I think you may have some problems . . .

CHAIR: Would you identify yourself, sir.

MR. SILVERMAN: My name is I. J. Silverman. I am attorney for the owners of this property. My office is at 40 Court Street, Boston. I think perhaps you might have some problem because of what I have pointed out. I would like to be heard when it is my turn.

CHAIR: Elected officials or executive directors of reviewing agencies who wish to speak on the question of the designation of the Armory - are there any of those present?

(Reviewing Agencies: Boston Redevelopment Authority)

MS. DEBORAH FAWCETT:

My name is Deborah Fawcett. I work for the BOSTON REDEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY as District Planner for this neighborhood, and I'd just like to read a letter written to Pauline Harrell from ROBERT WALSH, Director of the BRA.

Dear Ms. Harrell:

Thank you for transmitting to me the study reports of the Commission concerning the proposed Landmark designations for the Donald McKay House in East Boston and the Armory of the First Corps of Cadets in Downtown Boston.

In my opinion, these are excellent examples of structures which should be recognized and protected by being designated as historic Landmarks by the Commission.

I recommend, pending the outcome of the public hearings scheduled for January 25, that the Landmarks Commission consider seriously voting formal Landmark designation for the McKay House and the Armory.

In addition, I recommend that the Commission actively participate with the City and the BRA in developing longterm reuse proposals for the Armory which are financially viable and consistent with City objectives.

Sincerely,

(signed)

Robert F. Walsh
Director

(Ms. Fawcett submitted the letter to the Chair.)

CHAIR (at 4:47 p.m.): We will recess for a couple of minutes.

CHAIR (at 4:53 p.m.): We have a letter from the MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION,

(Reviewing Agencies: Massachusetts Historical Commission)

MS. MYERS: Letter from Elizabeth Reed Amadon, Executive Director of the MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION, addressed to Pauline Chase Harrell, Chairperson, Boston Landmarks Commission:

Dear Ms. Harrell:

Thank you for giving the Massachusetts Historical Commission the opportunity to comment on the proposed designation of the Armory of the First Corps of Cadets on the corner of Arlington Street and Columbus Avenue as a Landmark.

The Massachusetts Historical Commission staff considers the building, listed in the National Register of Historic Places on May 22, 1973, to be significant both architecturally and historically. It is a fine example of the rugged Romanesque style often used for armories and is considered to be one of architect William Gibbons Preston's outstanding achievements. The Armory holds a vital position in the streetscape of both Columbus Avenue and Arlington Street and its loss would cause irreparable damage to the area's character.

Historically, the building is significant for its association with the First Corps of Cadets, chartered in 1741 as the bodyguard of the Governor of the Province of Massachusetts Bay. The Corps, whose service has been uninterrupted except for a short period between 1774-1776, participated in the Revolutionary War, the Civil War and World War I. In 1940 the Corps became one of the first National Guard Units, and its current membership roster reveals the Corps' continued significance in Boston.

For these reasons the Massachusetts Historical Commission staff recommends that the Boston Landmarks Commission designate the Armory of the First Corps of Cadets as a Landmark.

Sincerely yours,

(signed)

Elizabeth Reed Amadon
Executive Director
Massachusetts Historical Commission
State Historic Preservation Officer

CHAIR: Thank you.

Are there any other persons here in the category of elected officials or executive directors of reviewing agencies? (no response)

The next group is that of representing the owner.

(Representative of Owner)

MR. I. J. SILVERMAN (attorney representing FITZGERALD INVESTMENT TRUST, LANFITZ TRUST, and KENFITZ TRUST):

I have a very brief statement, that I won't bother to read, but will give them to you and you can pass them out.

We agree wholeheartedly with what Mrs. Myers said before about how unique this building is, and it is, and it is historic - it's everything that anybody says. But the fact remains, however, that neither Mrs. Myers nor any one of you gentlemen have got to pay anything toward the expense of upkeeping this building. The City expects taxes, and the bank expects to be paid its mortgage. And the Act provides that we cannot change anything in that building without first coming to you. Now, up to now it's been occupied. The place is vacant; it brings in no income whatever. The owner will be required to find somebody who could use it. We don't know who can, but whoever wants it will no doubt require some changes. We cannot make any changes unless we come to you or to some other body, and either obtain the right to make the changes or be denied the changes. Now, when Mr. Fitzgerald as Trustee bought this property, he bought it free of all restrictions, with the right to do with it as he pleased. He has been approached from time to time to have it torn down and make a parking space out of it; he has not done it, even though it would have meant considerable profit to him.

He is a former Fire Commissioner of the City of Boston; he has a great deal of pride in the City of Boston. But the Act does give you some authority to negotiate with him. You can take this property by eminent domain. If the property is as good as we say, and which I admit it is, and should be preserved as a monument in the City of Boston, and

it is historic, I think it should be taken by the City of Boston or the state or the nation. But you cannot impose such an onerous duty upon a single person, who bought it with his own money without asking anybody for any favors and has maintained it in good condition and even better than it was when he purchased it. So if you can arrange that sometime - and you want to appoint a committee to discuss the matter with the owners - and arrange too that if you don't take it by eminent domain, if you can't see a way clear to do it, that if he does obtain a tenant and if such a tenant requires some substantial changes in this building, that he be permitted to make such changes unless you people at that time are willing to take the property off his hands. He is not looking to make any fantastic profit. But he cannot be burdened fairly or equitably by any rules that you people are going to make in establishing this as a Landmark.

I think my thoughts as expressed here are pretty much set out in the letter that I have given you. And that is the message that my client has asked me to deliver to you.

CHAIR: Are there any questions for Mr. Silverman? (no response)

The next category is property owners of abutting or nearby areas - anyone in that category who wishes to speak in favor of the designation? (no response)

Residents of abutting and nearby areas - anyone in that category who wishes to speak in favor of the designation? (no response)

Representatives from interest groups, local organizations, and public agencies - anyone in that group who wishes to speak in favor of the designation?

(Interest Groups, Local Organizations:
Back Bay Federation for Community Development)

MR. DANIEL AHERN:

My name is Daniel Ahern - Executive Director of the BACK BAY FEDERATION FOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT, at 419 Boylston Street. I should say that the Federation has not formally voted on the question of designation because the last meeting preceded the notice. However, I think that quite obviously one could infer from the Federation's interest in the building its support. I have a statement which I can give you.

The Federation has been interested in the building for several years. It was, as you know, leased to the University of Massachusetts, and when the lease was expiring, we sought a new use. We recommended in 1973 that Emerson College acquire the building and swap off Beacon Street properties which could be converted to housing, and they did proceed to take an option for that purpose, but could not finance the improvements. They still have a lingering interest in the subject, by the way, but I seriously doubt it will materialize.

We also recommended, with Kathy Kane, that the building be made available for the Bicentennial, which it was, and housed the Victorian exhibit until last October. We recommended the building for the Children's Museum; it would have made an excellent Children's Museum, but they went elsewhere, as you know. In March of 1976, I prepared a study for the Civic Advisory Committee and the Boston Redevelopment Authority entitled "Downtown as an Arts Center" and recommended at that time that the building and adjacent properties be the new campus for the Massachusetts College of Art. The College was very interested; the BRA was not, and chilled the proposal, and it died.

Then we received a proposal from Mr. Gannett and Mr. Donham, that many of you have seen, to use the building for the State Archives. It could, we feel, make an excellent Archives for scholars, as well as public exposition facilities; it could be a center for historic interest in the Commonwealth. Unfortunately, the Secretary of the Commonwealth, supported by BRA, filed legislation which torpedoed that plan and created the possibility of the Archives' going to Columbia Point. However, we have recently sent a letter to the Secretary of State Planning, a copy of which I will leave you, suggesting a change in the policy, and I have talked with him and the Governor, both of whom believe that the effort to put the Archives in the Armory is a good one and they support it. It remains to be seen as to whether or not the building can actually be used as an Archives. I know of no reason why it cannot, and that, I believe, is a sound reuse proposal.

There are other possibilities. But on the basis of our experience, we believe that the Armory has important reuse potentials, and we will continue to work toward them; and we favor, obviously, the preservation of the building.

CHAIR: Are there any questions for Mr. Ahern?

MR. AHERN: I will leave these two statements with the secretary.

CHAIR: Are there representatives of other interest groups or local organizations who wish to speak in favor of the designation?

(Interest Groups, Local Organizations:
City Conservation League)

MS. ANN BEHA:

I'm Ann Beha, First Vice President of the CITY CONSERVATION LEAGUE, which is a nonprofit Boston-based educational and activist preservation organization. Our Board of Directors wishes to express its hearty support of Landmark designation for the First Corps of Cadets Armory.

Built by William G. Preston in 1891, this is certainly one of the most impressive, distinctive, and important buildings in Boston. The building serves both as an anchor for the South End historical neighborhood and as an architectural contribution that makes up a special part of our whole granite heritage here in the city. The uses of this massive Romanesque-style fortress may come under debate at this meeting, but the present reuse scheme should not influence the Commission's bestowal of Landmark designation distinction on the building. We all as professionals must create new uses for old buildings, but to that end we need as our starting point the foundation that Landmark status designation provides. The designation is the beginning step towards reuse. Once there is recognition of our heritage which can remain unchanged and secure, then we can move forward to the transitory or even long-range set of uses which will ensure the building's future.

CHAIR: Thank you. Any questions for Ms. Beha? (no response)

Anyone else in the group in the category of representatives of local organizations? (no response)

Qualified persons wishing to state professional opinions or expert testimony in favor? (no response)

The general public wishing to speak in favor of the designation?
(no response)

Is there anyone who would wish to be recorded in favor who does not wish to speak? (no response)

Now we will move on to opposition.

Anyone representing property owners in abutting or nearby areas who wish to speak in opposition? (no response)

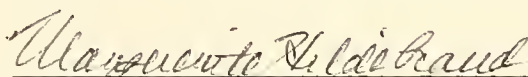
Residents of abutting and nearby areas wishing to speak in opposition?
(no response)

Is there any opposition? (no response)

Then that completes the list. In that case we have finished with that hearing.

(5:07 p.m.)

Respectfully submitted,


Marguerite Hildebrand

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Boston Landmarks Commission
Public hearing on The
Armory of the First Corps
of Cadets Jan 25 1977

C69

B7h Boston Landmarks Commission

